

AS AN ex-office boy, I contemplate night baseball with mixed emotions. As plain as the nose on your face, it is a capitalistic plot to enforce the speed-up on the junior members of the firm. For what good is the ancient and honorable grandmother's-funeral gag, now that you can actually work all day and still get to the ball park in time to see the game? That is, assuming there are any seats left.

But seriously, this season's tenth anniversary of official night baseball is much more significant than it appears. Night games were inaugurated in the minor leagues at Des Moines, Iowa, in 1930, and worked so well that today seven out of ten minor-league games are played under lights. But night baseball was persistently resisted by the big-league magnates until Larry MacPhail, present head of the Brooklyn Dodgers, introduced it in Cincinnati several seasons ago when he was general manager of the Reds, whose cash customers were getting fewer and fewer. The advent of the mazdas turned out to be just what the doctor ordered, and was one of the factors that put enough cash in the Reds' bank account to spawn a pennant winner last year.

MacPhail thus broke the ice, but still only eight major-league parks have installed night-baseball lights, and three others are investigating the rumor that it has been successful.

To be sure, it costs money to light a ball park—but it's cheaper than playing to empty seats. Go through the attendance figures for big-league games last year and see how frequently teams drew 3,000 admissions in stadiums big enough to hold 40,000 to 50,000 customers. Then look at the night-game records in those same parks and observe how thirty-five such games averaged 24,000 spectators, or an aggregate of nearly 900,000! In the maiden test at Cincinnati, indeed, there were four times as many cash customers at the first seven night games as there were at any seven comparable day games.

As a matter of fact, this night ball playing is really seventeen years old. The whole thing came about quite accidentally as far back as 1923, when the General Electric Company undertook to illuminate the company's new athletic field at Lynn, Massachusetts. Nobody had given a thought to night baseball then: the idea was merely to prolong the available recreational period of daytime employees. But even before the engineers were finished with the installation a gang of neighborhood kids showed up one night with balls and bats and proceeded to organize a game. At first nobody paid any attention to them. But presently it dawned on the engineers that these kids were playing a normal brand of baseball under the lights.

#### The First Game

"WE'VE got something here," concluded the engineers. And in August, 1923, after a few technical alterations were made, 5,000 spectators in Lynn saw the first successful night-baseball game ever played. (The term, "first successful game" is used advisedly, because this idea was tried as far back as 1883 in Fort Wayne, Indiana, but was a flop because the illumination was inadequate.) Two months later 6,000 people saw the first night-football game at the same field in Lynn.

But that was nearly twenty years ago and there's been a revolution in the nation's sporting habits. It came most dramatically in minor-league baseball circles and quickly stormed football. Now Colonel Matt Winn, sponsor of the Kentucky Derby, risks the opinion that in five years half of the horse racing in the country will be under lights.

Naturally, this development is not restricted to professional-sports operations. Softball, which is so popular all over the country, has been given a further boost by night playing. In winter, ice skating, outdoor hockey and tobogganing have all come under the glow of the mazdas. And many colleges and even high schools have introduced night football successfully.

In Platte City, Missouri, for example, the high-school team has played football under lights for two seasons, increasing game at-

# LIGHT UP—AND PLAY!

**Night baseball started it. Now floodlit parks and playgrounds throughout the nation are working overtime. Result? Less crime, fewer accidents and a whole new world of sport for old and young**

**by Paul W. Kearney**

tendance 245 per cent. And in Montpelier, Ohio, high-school football at night jumped the average attendance 300 per cent.

In Fresno, California, the Miniature Racing Car Club—those enthusiasts who race tiny model cars at 60 miles an hour or better—illuminated their one-third-mile asphalt track and now draw from 5,000 to 8,000 cash spectators to their meets.

So the real significance of this revolution is not that the professional promoters will take in more money, but that more recreational time has been given the sports-loving public. And we won't reach the crux of the matter until we begin to illuminate "sand-lot" diamonds, more softball fields, our playgrounds, parks and other recreational facilities, which so often are a dead loss after twilight.

When cities lay out tax money for public playgrounds, it is only horse sense to spend a trifle more and treble or quadruple the use of those areas. Yet in the entire United States there aren't more than 2,000 lighted recreational areas—and fifty per cent of those have been created since 1927. Chicago and Nashville were really the pioneers in this field; Milwaukee, Memphis, Cincinnati, Seattle

and a few others have done outstanding work since. But the bulk of the progress has been in the smaller rather than the larger centers.

Decatur, Illinois, for example, financed the lighting of one playground through the Community Chest and other contributions. It was such a howling success with the public that four more playgrounds were illuminated and plans made for installations in all the others.

#### A Good Example

FLINT, MICHIGAN, as another specific case, illuminated not only forty-two play areas but also its schools and schoolyards—which are a dead loss after 4 p.m. in nine cities out of ten. It packs these areas nightly with as many adults as children, either watching or participating in some form of wholesome recreation. One result was a seventy-per-cent reduction in juvenile delinquency. Another was a marked reduction in deaths of children playing on streets. A third was the building up of a fine civic morale.

I've been in most of the important cities of this country, but I have never seen anything like the spectacle of Flint at night, when seemingly the entire population can hardly wait to clear away the supper dishes and dash out to schoolyard or playground and have some fun. All you need is one glimpse of thousands of mothers and fathers and sons and daughters all playing together under the lights, and you ask: "Why in heaven's name don't we do that in our home town?"

I mean, why can't healthy fun take the place of standing around a gin mill all night

or congregating on street corners or wallowing in idle gossip over the back fence? Healthy fun means not only big-league baseball; it means, also, softball, tennis, swimming, horse-shoe tossing, badminton, archery, ping-pong and bicycling on restricted paths.

It means group singing, clay-modeling classes, amateur concerts, folk dancing, manual crafts—any recreation the people enjoy in the time they can most conveniently enjoy it—at night.

#### Crimes at Night

I CAME home from that trip just in time to read an observation by New York City's Police Commissioner to the effect that any man who walked through parts of Central Park after dark took his life in his hands. And I couldn't help but marvel at how far the so-called "tank towns" have progressed beyond us smug city slickers!

The results of inaugurating such a plan are worth the time and money it costs. Many of the communities that have illuminated their play areas have financed initial costs by public subscription; about half of them make moderate charges for the use of certain lighted areas. In not a few places meters have been installed which turn on the lights when the proper amount in coins has been deposited. Proper layout of play areas simplifies the lighting problem, and judicious use of the facilities also results in economies.

But these are mere details. The more important thing is that we sorely need lighted recreational areas in all our cities. Warden Lewis E. Lawes of Sing Sing Prison has said that "it is a well-established fact that supervised recreation in congested areas makes for crime prevention." And since eighty per cent of our crimes are committed after dark, it's no trick to add two and two together.

The National Recreation Association also points out that adults, through music, drama, games, athletics, social activities and community celebrations, should find in their common interests the opportunity for a common community service.

A glance at today's headlines will tell the least observant that there are troubled days ahead—days when community solidarity is going to be more vital to our existence as a free people than ever before in our history.

So let's light up our public playgrounds and parks and get busy cementing that civic unity—at night!

**The End**



Acme



Night lighting has brought added throngs to baseball and football fields. It can do the same for city playgrounds